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A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SOCIALISM

BY G.H. STROBELL

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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

This article is dedicated to my brethren in the Presbyterian Church and to all other representatives of Calvinism. Those true to the traditions of their faith can hardly fail to be friendly to the extension of the idea of democracy to industry; because Calvinism was one of the earliest modern vehicles for the propaganda of democratic ideas. Says Bancroft: "Calvinism was revolutionary; it taught as a Divine revelation the natural equality of man." "It is the essential tendency of Calvinism," says Doyle, "to destroy all distinctions of rank and all claims to superiority which rest on wealth or political expediency." "Calvinism is essentially democratic," says Buckle. "A democratic religion," it is called by De Tocqueville. "Calvinism opposes hereditary monarchy, autocracy and bondage," said Bancroft. John Richard Green writes: "In that mighty elevation of the masses embodied in the Calvinist doctrine lay the germ of the modern principles of human equality." "Calvinism," says Froude, "has inspired and maintained the bravest efforts ever made to break the yoke of unjust authority."

These testimonies show the revolutionary character of the movement which was the beginning of Presbyterianism. The ideas of the early Calvinists were destructive of the then existing order, and Church and State, then as now, controlled by a master class in its own interest, hunted and slew them as though they were wild beasts. Yet they kept the faith. May their spiritual descendants be equally devoted in the coming conflict for industrial democracy, without which our boasted religious and political equality is but a shadow.

G. H. STROBELL.

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I.

There is a great and growing interest in religious circles regarding Socialism. The time is past when the statements of a subsidized press are taken as truth by the religious man. Investigation is the order of the day, and no one has ever fairly studied the Socialist philosophy concerning the development of Society in our day without becoming convinced of its truth. Because of this there are hundreds of clergymen and thousands of church members avowed Socialists and many are members of the party organization and assist in its councils and propaganda. There is no conflict of views along religious lines. When the investigator sees that the constant change and evolution of mankind from a lower to a higher state is the product of natural law due to the struggle for existence; when he examines one historical epoch after another and places his finger upon the economic causes of each successive change and finds no mystery nor intervention of any supernatural power, he goes as far as his experience will allow him. The believer in a revealed religion has no quarrel with him; the whole world is a debtor to the determined efforts of the searchers into the phenomena of material things.

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There was a time when the theory of gravitation was denounced because it was thought to undermine religion and to deny revelation, and atheists used this mistake against the church. There was a time when Gallileo's statement of the laws of the planetary system was held to be subversive of religion by an ignorant and immoral priesthood, and atheists have been using that error ever since as an argument against religion. There was a time when the results of the studies of Darwin were thought to forecast the destruction of religious faith and atheists were quick to use his theories against religion. The Socialist doctrine of the materialist conception of history—economic determinism—is now being used by the atheist as positive proof of the falsity of revealed religion and the subsidized religious press parades their sayings as evidence of the fixed tendency of Socialist propaganda toward atheism. Whereas the truth is, that there is no inherent contradiction between Socialist science and revealed religion. Every newly discovered law in material things, every evolutionary process that directs or forces mankind to better conditions, is a new proof of Divine Omniscience, of God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge. We see Design in all the boundless provision made for every need of man at the different stages of his development; and we see the development inspired, inaugurated and forwarded by laws or forces which seem to use man as an instrument. We choose, therefore, not without reasonable grounds, to believe that there is in this orderly development and in the provision made for each stage of it in the natural resources of the earth, a design, a plan that evinces a Divine Intelligence, a Supreme Power to order all things.

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II.

There is a new perception of truth and a new ideal rising to dominance in the minds of men of our generation. Strange to say, it is slower to find its way into the church and among church members than among those who, as a class, are not interested in church affairs. This may be explained by the application of the Socialist doctrine of economic determinism, which says that a man's mind will unconsciously halt in a course of reasoning the continuation of which would lead him to regard his own particular method of getting a livelihood as immoral. It further explains that in the prevailing struggle for and against the further exploitation of labor the church organization has been quietly seized and fortified by the exploiting class, just as courts and universities and legislatures have been stealthily secured by them. It is the members of this class, high in position and influence in the churches, whose self interest closes their minds and consciences to their failure to conform to God's law in business. With their followers and dependents all told they form a comparatively small part of the church membership, but it is this small minority, comprising the bulk of the business men of the country, who, while endeavoring to practice for themselves an extremely individual piety, are the authors and abettors of sinful conditions at which the world stands amazed and startled.

Thus their interest in real estate for profit causes the growth of slums of the vilest description, and actively protects vice and an open saloon in our cities. The adulteration of goods made by them for profit has become a world-wide menace to health. Is it too

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much to say that there is hardly a man engaged in the distributive or retail trade who does not sell adulterated goods and who does not know it? Or that the poor are systematically starved by the high profits levied by railroads, commission men and retailers on the produce of the country? For an increased dividend laws governing the application of safety appliances to railroads are defied, and 3,000 men are slaughtered and 32,000 crippled annually by the non-action of Christian stockholders. Because public franchises, contracts and other semi-public interests are great wealth-producing agencies, Christian business men bribe and otherwise corrupt legislatures, officials and judges, until our government is a by-word among nations.

The business enterprises that produce sweatshops in our cities, child labor in New England and the South, the loss of life in the mining regions and in unhealthy trades, and the scanty wage that leads to prostitution and starvation everywhere generally have as their managers and owners professing Christians. The so-called better classes are responsible for all these things and the so-called better classes are almost invariably church members.

The crimes of the poor are punished severely, but are not to be compared with these in magnitude or results. Compare the ordinary murderer, crazed by drink and brutalized by poverty, with the stockholders and directors who control railroads, mines and factories and who refuse to vote for safety appliances and kill tens of thousands and maim hundreds of thousands annually. Compare the petty thief with the managers of the giant monopolies who hold up a nation. Compare the common forger with the men who water stocks to the amount of millions. Must we not conclude

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that the greater the evil results of an immoral act the greater the criminal, and though removed by time and space and intermediary agents from the consequences of the immoral act, is the responsibility any the less?

III.

However the whole problem should be fairly stated. These men, aside from the evil methods of their money getting, may be and usually are kind, lovable and generous, pure in morals, and, beyond men of any other age, free from the besetting sins of envy and hatred and pride. They maintain the most stupendous charities the world has ever seen. Honestly believing that our present high civilization flows from the exercise of the Christian faith, they spend vast sums in the extension of Christianity in every part of the globe. They recognize the brotherhood of mankind in times of great famine or pestilence by lavish contributions of their means and by personal exertions. They build and endow schools, colleges and universities. As public citizens they are foremost in every reform movement. Incongruous as it may seem, they help to form the very public sentiment which condemns their own actions as private business men. If their attention is called to any discrepancy between their religion and their business life, they disclaim responsibility for the system and see no evil in conducting business in the way they are accustomed to doing it and assert their inability in any way to change the conditions.

The average observer, especially the wage-earner, is puzzled and confounded by this condition of things. If he has not a firm grasp

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on some religious experience he becomes gradually an opponent of the church, holding that the appearance of goodness in private life is mere hypocrisy. The real Christian knows it is not, but he is puzzled and ashamed. If he be of an aggressive nature he talks plainly about these things. How can a man's conscience bestir itself for a moment of inattention during prayer, or the neglect to speak to some one about his soul's salvation, and remain at peace regarding frightful economic or political crimes committed every day? The growth of the church is no comfort while the influential portion of its members thus refuse to obey its teachings. He reasons that the apparent tendency is not in the right direction; it is clearly toward a greater worship of wealth and power, with the consequent misery and oppression of the masses, and to the average Christian there seems to be no sign of anything to check that tendency. This lust for power and riches has arisen despite the preaching of present day Christianity among those who profess it. Will the preaching of the present day Christianity stop or turn it back to the principles of its Founder?

So it happens that to the average Christian the religious sky is overcast; he is astonished and ashamed and wonders what the outcome will be, while the great exploited class, among whom the economic conscience is most active, stands aloof in sullen indifference or actual hostility.

To this average Christian church member, despondent and depressed by the present age, dwelling by choice alternately in the dim past and in a far off heavenly future, there is a waking hour coming soon.

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IV.

There is a distinct gain to every Christian who learns the Socialist philosophy. Can any one imagine the keen delight that came to the analytic and constructive mind of Paul the Apostle when he saw all the confusing elements of the old religion; all its apparent failures as prophecy and as a law of life; all the previous revelations to his race; all the disquieting instincts of man's spiritual nature; all his hopes and aspirations toward the Infinite—all these come into a glorious harmony? The plan of redemption was complete, the confusion became order. From the highest in the heavens to the lowliest thing on earth, everything fitted into the plan. Can you wonder he burned to tell men what he saw?

In due time, when mankind is ready for it, there comes a revelation of God's plan for the redemption of our earthly life. It is so wonderful that it creates in the life all the old impassioned fervor of the early Christians. It is sent as of old to the poor and lowly, and the witness of the Holy Spirit is not wanting in this new dispensation. Those touched by this holy zeal are like the first martyrs, enduring persecution and starvation and death itself for their ideal. They wander everywhere preaching the glad tidings to all nations. They are the first to study aright the economy of the ages, the first to break away from the traditional economic conceptions of life. They see that all the previous experiences of the race, all the hopes and aspirations of man for man on earth fit into the collectivist plan; and, as in these latter days they see development of the new order—every year a mighty step forward—can they hold their peace? With heart and brain and tongue, soul and body,

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they are working a mighty host already, for the coming of the co-operative commonwealth; they are telling the glad news of an economic salvation to earth's burden bearers.

For the first time in the history of the world there is an intelligent and systematized movement toward the conscious organization of a just society. It is the Socialist movement now on its way to a speedy triumph in all civilized nations. It is worth studying in all its phases.

V.

To the Christian the materialistic conception of history—economic determinism—is only another name for the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” The race cannot always defeat by its sinfulness the determination of God that righteousness and justice shall reign on earth. There is something in the evolution of economic conditions in the race life that will make mankind, of its own free will and as its deliberate choice, create a just society.

This change is upon us; every newspaper records its history and development. Thousands of books and magazines use it for a theme. Scientific observers are watching each step and weighing every possibility. Every other revolution in history has taken centuries, but here is one which may take place perhaps in a single lifetime. However, we must know the past evolutionary process in order to see it clearly.

The Socialist science of economics teaches that there have always been two classes in the world: Those who labored to produce wealth and those who without labor lived on the results of the labor of others. It is held that a parasitic class was necessary to the develop-

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ment of the race, and that without leisure from enforced labor progress in science, art, literature and general knowledge was impossible.

When, however, Society reached a point where wealth could be produced in much larger proportion to the labor involved than formerly, this parasitic class has not allowed the race to advance by the improvement of the workers through a larger share of the wealth produced. It has appropriated to itself a relatively much larger share, hence, greater power and influence, which it has used for the further enslavement of the masses.

The wealth was based on the land, possession of which marked the difference between the two classes. A candid survey of history shows that uniformly laws were enacted and customs established by the dominant class, all in their interests, almost degrading the producer to a level with the beasts of the field. This, after ages of time, found its fruit and flower in the feudal system. The worker was a serf. He and his belonged to the land, were bought and sold with it and could not leave it except by death.

But the wars of the middle ages increased the then small middle class by the addition of men who had earned their freedom through service, also through skill in trade, in the professions and arts. Commerce expanded, the useful arts multiplied, machinery began to be invented which made cheaper and quicker production by associated labor possible, and the time came when the feudal system, under which the labor power of the worker was chained to the soil, had to be broken. It was to the interest of the lords of the land that this system should remain in operation, but it was to the interest of the growing middle

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class that they should be able to have enough to spare of labor to fill their mills and factories. It was to the interest of the worker that he should be able to sell his labor where he could get the most for it. The last two classes, the workers and the middle class, pooled their issues, broke the feudal bondage, and finally established constitutional government with the suffrage and ushered in the competitive era.

During the few hundred years this contest was raging the interests of these two classes were the same. When victory came they separated into the same old division of exploiter and exploited. Industry, which had been carried on for use or exchange, under which system there was hardly any fraud or adulteration practiced, and where the maker's individual pride, skill and sense of beauty showed in his handiwork, was now conducted for profit in competition with other made-for-profit goods. The lords of industry now faithfully copied and allied themselves with their former enemies, the lords of the land, and with them captured all the avenues of power and influence to perpetuate their sway.

But it was seen by scientific observers that the era of competition could not last, that it held within itself the seeds of dissolution. Competition was war, and war had its victors and vanquished. Over ninety per cent of business enterprises failed and the struggle left ever fewer victors, the vanquished taking their places among the working class. Finally, to protect themselves from the ruinous strife, combination was entered upon by the owners of industry, and great wealth has come to them from the consequent economy of management, from the elimination of useless labor and competition in prices.

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The result is that the workers are trained to work co-operatively by their employers, in large masses and on huge undertakings. Then the directing, employing and business world, to save themselves from the stress of competition, are forced into co-operation and combination. These great combinations in single and correlated industries in time force the workers into huge federated unions that they may in turn treat with their single employer on more equal terms.

Meanwhile the education of more than a century of participation in government has not been lost upon the worker. He has had the power but not the knowledge required to use it for his own benefit; but now we are confronted by a great working class political movement, educated and ably led. Does it not look as if the real principle brought to mankind by the breakdown of the Feudal System is not competition, which was merely an incident, but combination and co-operation?

VI.

If we are right therefore in our interpretation of this evolution, we must expect the concentration of industry into fewer and still fewer hands to go on; for the new method of productive industry is too valuable to be abolished; its economics, its productiveness are a revelation to mankind. With it we can use the most stupendous and costly machinery and labor-saving appliances. The most difficult problems disappear before its giant resources. No dream is too wild, no expectations that the mind of man can conceive so great, but that they can be worked out by the intelligent confederated power of the producers of industry to-day.

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By the side of this concentration and at a still faster pace goes on the education and organization of the working class along economic and political lines. Their sole aim is the public ownership of these giant resources which they needs must own to become economically free. If then the trend toward combination is natural and not to be turned back—and if the people in their collective capacity have the power and administrative capacity to even increase the output and the usefulness of these combinations in business—is it not inevitable that the change shall take place? Is it not inevitable when the alternative is a system of personal slavery, a system of personal slavery to an impersonal industrial machine, such as the world has never seen before, where wage slave competes against wage slave for a slave's task, knowing that every step of the way toward combination eliminates hosts of unnecessary and useless workers, their competitors in the wage market? There is only one conclusion we can come to from our study of these conditions; that we shall soon collectively own and administer the means of production and distribution. This will be Socialism.

We must surely recognize a Power shaping man's destinies to some higher and nobler end—to some happier state of existence—by using man's self interest or selfishness in the process.

VII.

What is Socialism? The student will tell you that Socialism is the name given by scientific observers to that era or condition which, as a perfectly natural development, is taking the place of our passing competitive system. Just as competition succeeded feudalism, so com-

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petition is being displaced by Collectivism or Socialism. He will tell you further that there are three great fundamental truths that make the change to Socialism inevitable:

First—The Class Struggle. He affirms that there has been all through history a struggle, now hidden, now open, between oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited, master and slave, employer and employe; that each economic period ends in a revolutionary reconstruction of society or in the ruin of the contending classes. This struggle is on to-day. It is a force at work in society to be studied, interpreted and directed: this the Socialist seeks to do.

Second—Surplus value or unearned income. Labor applied to nature is the only source of wealth. It is now easily seen that those who labor are being exploited, and that the capital used in production at present is the result of the surplus value produced by labor and retained by the employer. Those who do not labor productively live upon the labor of those who do. It follows, therefore, that those who labor do not get what they produce. This exploitation of labor is universal; the form changes, but the practice goes on. It is not quite so apparent under the wage system as under slavery or serfdom, but it is there nevertheless. It is hidden under the various processes of our business system, in rent, interest, and profit. The Socialist philosophy points out the way it works, educates the social conscience to consider the means of exploitation immoral and describes the evolutionary steps society must take to eliminate the possibility of its continuance. Socialism, which contemplates the public ownership and operation of the means of production and distribution, might be defined as a system under which it would

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be impossible for any set of men to live on the labor of others.

Third--Economic determinism or the scientific interpretation of history in the light of economic conditions. In any given epoch the most important and fundamental element in shaping social, legal and political institutions is economic. This doctrine points out the determining element in social movements and enables the energy of man to be directed to the strategic point, upon the real issue. It does not deny that there are other factors, even ideal elements in history. It asserts that for men in the mass economic interests are decisive.

Based upon these three main thoughts we see that Socialism is the modern struggle of the oppressed class, the workers, knowing that they are exploited, knowing that good surroundings are necessary for a full, well-rounded life, to throw off the yoke of the oppressor and exploiter and to retain for themselves and their families all that they produce.

As the knowledge of these truths will permeate the working class sooner or later, their self-interest will lead them to unite in the field of political action, where, being greatly in the majority, they will be successful. Thus we can assuredly say that Socialism is inevitable.

But what do the working class propose to do with the ballot, when they are united and have a majority? Let us see. We have yet to hear the wage-earner's answer to the question, What is Socialism?

The wage-earner will reply somewhat in this wise. By Socialism I mean the movement among the workers for the public or co-operative ownership and operation of all industries and distributing agencies, which will prevent

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exploitation so that I shall get the full product of my toil.

Therefore, we workers shall vote for the public ownership of railroads, telegraph and express business, and of National, State and Municipal utilities. Those secured we shall take over the business of those industries where the process of consolidation approaches completion. This could be done without any severe shock to the remaining business interests. It is probable that the land held by speculators out of use would be next acquired by the nation and on it industry on a gigantic scale, with up-to-date machinery and scientific processes, would be organized by the public to feed, clothe and care for its own employes.

These changes would institute economic equality, which we are ready for and which we want and must have; we demand it as our right and not because of ability or fitness. We are not at all doubtful of our ability to create a better state of society than the trading class has given us. As a class we are honest, our labor is honest; we render far more than an equivalent for what we receive. Therefore, as we are the victims of the dishonesty of the trading and exploiting class, we have an interest in the establishing of honest conditions.

Because we produce everything, we have been forced into evil conditions that are due entirely to the greed of the exploiters or arise out of our impotent rebellion against our servitude. For the profit of the trading class we have been herded into slums, tempted by the saloon, driven by scanty wage into poverty, prostitution and suicide, poisoned and killed by the wholesale, made criminals and tramps, only that we might continue in subjection. We shall, therefore, have a inter-

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est in their removal. No other class has the power, much less the disposition, to free us from them.

We do not propose to eliminate private property. It is only private property used in production that is to be abolished. The worker's share of the product is his private property and may be disposed of in any way he pleases, and in no possible manner can he be deprived of it. There can be no way by which the present means of exploiting by **rent, interest or profits** can be used to reduce the purchasing power of his income. Under the co-operative ownership of the means of production and distribution there can be no non-productive class living upon the labor of the producer.

VIII.

There are those who say that Socialism is Christianity reduced to practice and that Jesus was the first Socialist. Such phraseology is misleading. The world at no time in authentic history has found itself ready for the collectivist plan. It needed the training of the millions in co-operation. It needed the science and knowledge to tap the earth's stored-up riches; it needed the marvelous machinery for the production of wealth; it needed knowledge of its own method of development; it needed the spirit of democracy. It needed more than all else a conviction of sin, a conviction of social and economic evils, through the exercise of which the generality of mankind are deprived of liberty and robbed of their share of the gifts God has so bountifully provided for all His children. This conviction comes through the misery, wretchedness and degradation of the race. It could only come in that manner, for

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it is not so much that knowledge is lacking as that this should be reinforced by an experience of evil and the certainty that there is no other alternative but the collectivist plan.

It is not mere knowledge that is wanted. Whether the Mosaic law embodied a knowledge and experience obtained from the higher mysteries of the ancient world, or whether God, as we believe, formulated that law, it certainly contains references and commands that show plainly a knowledge and appreciation of the sources of economic misery. It is worth our while to see how this law touched upon the economic basis of the life of the nation of Israel, to whom it was given, and its attitude toward the means of exploitation—**rent, interest and profit**—which Socialism does away with.

After the conquest of the promised land, for more than three hundred years (over twice the time of our own experience in democracy), the people of Israel lived in comparative obedience to their law, under which, all that time, no man or set of men rose to supreme power and which produced no very rich nor very poor. At the end of this period, with no practical experience of exploitation by superior wealthy classes, dazzled by the pomp and apparent riches of the foreign kings and nobility, and not realizing that a subject class paid for these things, the people chose a king. This choice of theirs, in the centuries which followed, caused the growth of a privileged class, living contrary to the law, by the ordinary means of exploitation—rent, interest and profit. During the democratic life of the nation under the judges the economic laws had been fully enforced: under the royal sovereignty they fell into contempt. There were pathetic attempts made by the prophets to convince the people how necessary these

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laws were, but the flagrant violations continued.

Foremost among the economic provisions were those relating to the land. This was the most important, as land is the source of all industry. Mosaic law provided that the land be divided among the people and that it should never be sold. To this end the people were numbered and the command was, "Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names." (Num. xxvi:53). The priesthood were enjoined to keep an accurate genealogy, and every child born into the nation was to have an inheritance of sufficient land for its support. This inheritance could only be temporarily estranged. In the sabbatical year, or the year of jubilee at farthest, it came back, if it had been temporarily alienated, into the possession of the family, its original owners. No crime, sin, nor spendthrift qualities, nor business inability on the part of its owner, nor cleverness of the exploiter could keep it away from the family very long. This law prevented the rise of a landlord aristocracy and landlordism. There was no rent to pay. There are many passages stating over and over again the law's condemnation of the three methods of exploitation—rent, interest and profit. Even a cursory reading will reveal them. So it is unnecessary to give more than one on each phase.

"The land shall not be sold forever; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." (Lev. xxv:23.)

"And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof. It shall be a jubilee unto you and ye shall return every man unto his possession; and ye shall return every man unto his own family." (Lev.

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xxv:10.) The object of the law is frankly stated in Deut. xv:4: "To the end that there be no poor among you."

The Law is just as emphatic against the taking of interest. The Hebrew word for this is some form of the verb **nashak**, the primary meaning of which is to bite as a serpent, next to oppress with usury or, as we call it now, interest. "Dan shall be a serpent—that **biteth** the horse's heels." "The Lord sent fiery serpents—they **bit** the people." "Look not upon the wine—at last it **biteth** as a serpent," are illustrations of the primary meaning. Among the many passages bearing upon this law are these two, and in all the Hebrew word for biter is the same as in the passage above—"If thou lend to any of my people, to the poor one who is living by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a **biter** (taker of interest), neither shalt thou lay upon him a **biting**—any interest (**nashak**)." (Ex. xxii:25.)

The next passage reveals to us also the position of the Law regarding the third important factor of exploitation—profit, translated increase: "And if thy brother becomes poor and his hand faileth with thee, then shalt thou strengthen him. Take thou no **usury** (interest) or **increase** (profit) of him; but fear thy God, that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury nor lend him thy victuals for **increase**." (Lev. xxv:35-37.)

The people applied themselves to productive labor. They were to exchange things produced, but give value for value; any other practice would allow the rise of a trading class living upon the fruits of the labor of others—the inevitable result of which would be to divide the nation into rich and poor. While **there** are many more passages relating

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to this subject in the books of the Law, we leave them to show by later passages that these laws were accepted and generally obeyed and that their violation was resented by the prophets and writers all through the ages, until the destruction of the nationality by the Romans in the first century. In the fifteenth Psalm David describes the righteous man: in a category of the ordinary sins which the righteous man avoids occur these words—"He that putteth not out his money on interest." This was four hundred years after the Law was given. In Proverbs, twenty-eighth chapter, retribution is threatened for the one "that by interest and increase increaseth his substance." A few hundred years later Ezekiel places the taking of interest and profit among the vilest acts and as deserving of death. The passage is in the eighteenth chapter—"If a man hath eaten upon the mountains and defiled his neighbor's wife; hath oppressed the poor and needy; hath spoiled by violence; hath not redeemed the pledge; hath given forth upon **interest**, and hath taken **profit**, shall he then live? He shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him." In the twenty-second chapter he repeats his denunciation—"In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken **interest** and **profit** and hast greedily gained of thy neighbor by extortion and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord thy God; behold therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made."

The Talmud represents the latter portion of the Jewish national life more intimately. Its sayings depict the beliefs and aspirations current among the people. Here are a few of the most direct sayings—"Make no profits with the objects needed for support of life." "No Hebrew is allowed to lend upon interest

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to a non-Hebrew." "The practice of taking interest is wicked as the shedding of blood." "He who by interest or increase transfers one man's goods to another shall answer to God for it with his very soul."

The violation of these laws of God and the exploitation practiced were the theme of all the prophets. Those using these means of exploitation, by reason of the wealth so acquired and by their gifts to the church, became in time the "better" classes. They captured the religious organization, which was also the governing power. They were outwardly very religious and procured some sort of a religious sanction through Rabbi Hillel for the taking of interest, just before the Christian era, but the people knew and sullenly scoffed at their pretensions of piety.

IX.

It is, however, in the picture of the life and times of Jesus as portrayed by the evangelists that we see most plainly how these laws were always vital factors, and how the constant reference to them made by our Lord found favor with the people and led directly to his death at the hands of the wealthy classes. The Baptist uses what must have been a popular phrase, in asking the Pharisees why they came to him. "Ye generation of vipers"—interest takers—and the people who heard him understand what was meant. The same phrase was also used by Jesus several times, and in that terrific arraignment of the ruling class of his people how fully he describes the economic lust that animated them. They bind heavy burdens and lay them upon men's shoulders; by their hypocrisies they repel men from the worship of God. They devour widow's houses (by interest). They corrupt and bribe to re-

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tain their hold. They do not execute the law. They are full of extortion. And that makes him think again of the current phrase, "Serpents, generation of vipers—interest takers—how shall ye escape the damnation of Hell?"

The cleansing of the Temple is another characteristic piece of evidence. The law of Moses had provided for a place in the Temple courts where those who lived at a distance could get the necessary sacrifices and offerings, but the priests violated the law by selling to dealers the right to traffic in these things. These dealers made a profit—a forbidden practice; therefore He called them "robbers" and drove them out. The priests should have furnished the offerings without adding a profit; no other explanation is at all reasonable of the use of the word "robbers."

Imagine Jesus in the house of His enemies, serene and scornful of their hypocrisy. That which came to him as a token of love—the costly ointment—they thought ought to have gone to the poor. He pierced their miserable sanctimoniousness by a shot at their violation of God's law for gain, at the practice which had **made** men poor, by saying, "The poor **ye** have always with you."

There is the frequent use of the word "extortion"; if you think of the ordinary buying and selling for profit and the taking of interest as moral and legal, where was the extortion? For, outside of the known fact that the law forbade these, there is not a single instance given, or even hinted at, that would warrant the term. Remember it was leveled at the religious leaders, not at the publicans or tax-gatherers.

The proper definition of the word "mammon" is also a revelation. It means gain, the unjust gain due to interest and profit and rent

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by which the producer was mulcted out of his product; it was never used to designate the reward of toil or the product of the fields. When Jesus said, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon," those around understood that one could not serve God and disobey these, His laws, at the same time. If the making of profit, the taking of interest and the continued ownership of the inheritance of others in the land was right, one could have served God and Mammon, for the practice of these things made men wealthy. In no other way could a man become rich.

That the cause of slavery and poverty with the consequent great degradation was well known among the people was proven in many ways; notice particularly what were evidently popular phrases. Both Jesus and John said, "Serpents, generation of vipers—interest takers—biters." The people must have used this since the time of David or Ezekiel. And ever since the time of Daniel the people had been talking of "**Haolam habba**," the Kingdom of God, the Messianic time of justice and righteousness to come "on earth, to supercede "**Hoalam hazzah**," the prevailing unjust order of extortion and injustice. In the sense of a new material order Jesus undoubtedly uses the common phrase, "The Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven." "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God"—create a just society where no one is hindered from enjoying his share of God's bounty—"and all these things"—food, clothing, shelter—"shall be added unto you." The lilies all get God's bounty; man has diverted it from his fellow man: a just state of society will allow it to benefit equally all men.

"My Kingdom is not of this world," is qualified by the lines following, "My Kingdom is not from hence." Man's plan for the world

was disorder; God's plan for the world was order and justice.

It is a curious thing for Christians to read into the parables of the pounds and the talents sanction of taking interest, which is directly forbidden elsewhere. The theme of these parables was personal responsibility. Upon the same ground Jesus should be taken as sanctioning cheating in the parable of the Unjust Steward. A part of the stage setting of a parable cannot be set over against the whole body of His uniform teaching and practice, as justifying the things He condemned.

Your pastor will tell you that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is designed to teach future punishment. Yet all the circumstances surrounding its narration and the story itself show that it was designed to teach the immorality of being rich. Because riches could not be gained except by methods that made men poor the beggar was placed at the rich man's gate. The rich man was kind hearted and generous, for Lazarus was not driven away and probably fed better than the average of the working class. The rich man's natural affections were highly developed; he wanted his friends warned of their peril. Like the modern rich, he and his class lived regardless of the immorality of their money getting, and considered poverty an institution ordained of God. This parable is another proof that the common people were kept informed by their law, which was read constantly in their synagogues, that wealth came from the use of means forbidden by that law. Jesus had plainly stated the sin in telling the story. His hearers knew, and the pharisees among them began to seek His destruction. He was a threat to their class.

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Almost criminal foolishness is manifested by the preacher who, in labor disputes talks from the text, "Be content with your wages." This advice John the Baptist gave to the Roman soldiers, awakened in the general revival occasioned by his preaching, who were notorious throughout the world as using their power over a conquered people to extort gifts and perquisites. These words, meant to lighten the burden of the common people, are used by some professional followers of Jesus to perpetuate their bondage.

Christ was the great preacher of discontent. He gave to the world the fundamental idea of equality, which was, that we are all God's children, equal heirs of nature's bounties, and when Paul pleads that the earthly relationships be hallowed with love and mentions with others that of master and servant he places no divine attestation upon it. In the same breath almost he says that the Lord is no respecter of persons. Yet this sentence is foolishly used to perpetuate the delusion of a divinely appointed order of master and servant.

X.

We are taught by Jesus to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on **earth**." Though the nature of His Kingdom was misunderstood by his disciples at first, it must have been owing to His teaching that they began to live differently, in some sort of communism endeavoring to realize their conception of his meaning. Whatever this was, the result was a society of this world and for this world that aroused the hatred and fear of the exploiting classes, and which, though peaceful and orderly, was the most virile and conquering force the world ever saw, and which

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brought the ruling classes at the close of the third century, to most desperate straits.

The despised Christian faith had won to itself all the slaves, the free toilers and producers of the whole Roman Empire. These people constituted a society of their own, sufficient unto itself. The active labor of its workers produced all things needed and provided for helpless old age and childhood. By producing for the present need and not laying up for themselves treasures on earth the Christians were literally smashing the class privileges of their time. There was nothing in their economy for the tax-gatherer, for the money-lender or the profit-seeker, for they traded among themselves and used their small over-production for charity and the freeing of those in bondage.

It was, as we can imagine, a community of production for use, and that long-ago nobility of parasites, used to power and the good things of earth, against whose rapacity this system was proof, crucified and burnt and slew and tortured and mangled without avail. The end of their world had come. What cared they if there was another God or more added to the rest: they had temples dedicated to sixty thousand. What cared they for religion, religion was for slaves. They used religion as a bug-a-boo, as an instrument to perpetuate their power of exploitation. But this system, so new, so strange, so dangerous to their supremacy, was ever growing, ever narrowing their sphere of action, until under the Emperor Constantine, by a seeming surrender, and by loading the church organization with wealth and power, they overthrew its democratic character, so that it became, and has generally been since, a supporter of class rule and of the

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usual exploitation of the masses by slavery, rent, interest and profit.

Very much more could be said concerning the economic meaning of passages of Scripture. If we would read the Bible as we do other books, with minds void of preconceived notions, we should see how wonderfully the economic teachings of Socialists are sustained in God's Word.

If He is to be the only King, society must be organized as a democracy. It must govern itself as a brotherhood of God's children: it must use labor so applied to Nature's bounties that none may be more favored than others, for God is no respecter of persons. Christians talk of such an ideal state with no thought of ever seeing it in this world. It is left to the working class, animated by a knowledge of its mission through the study of Socialism, to realize an ideal of its own, fraught with unutterable consequences to the world. The question for us who are Christians is—Has the church been found wanting and has God turned to others for the accomplishment of His designs?

XI.

The object of the preceeding pages is to show that the aim of the Socialist, namely, the elimination of all possibility of further exploitation by vesting the ownership of the means of production and distribution in the community, is well worth the study of Christians. There has been no attempt made to bolster up Socialism by the Bible texts introduced, nor to claim for it biblical authority, nor to confuse or combine it with Christianity. The evident conclusion to be drawn from the study is manifestly that the Christian could not consistently oppose the Socialist philosophy,

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and that Socialism is too much in line with God's plan of a world-wide kingdom of righteousness to be, as charged, permanently atheistic.

But the Socialist philosophy is essentially materialistic; that is, it takes cognizance only of the earthly development of radical conditions. From a study of these it discovers certain fundamental principles and processes of evolution that will lead to ascertained future results. Socialism is a political movement of the workers that is bound to appear wherever society has entered the capitalist phase, be it in Germany or the United States, Italy, Japan, or Russia. It is therefore almost needless to say that Socialism is not necessarily opposed to religion, because it leaves to the individual perfect freedom to reason out his own conclusions respecting the Creator and His Creation. Where Socialism is opposed by church organizations that have been captured and are held as fortresses by the capitalist class, antagonism is bound to exist.

XII.

For the millions of Christians who are sighing under the burdens and economic uncertainty of our age, who are puzzled because the church has no voice to reach the millions of the working class, who are in doubt concerning the reality of a spiritual experience that is so far from practice, who see no possible change in the conditions that have caused tremendous and wide-reaching poverty and wretchedness; for all these the discovery of Socialism will come as a revelation of God's power to care for the material welfare of mankind. The Divine law underlying all human institutions is slowly but surely working out the earthly salvation of mankind, and with the downfall

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of the capitalist system, now in its last stages, will go all the fruits of this profit-mad era. Drunkenness, prostitution, corruption, adulteration, the manifest perversion of justice, are all its offspring and cannot exist in an orderly co-operative state.

The knowledge of Socialism will come to the world as a great spiritual uplift, a presage of the coming triumph of Christian ideals. The despondency of the present will give way to a profound hope, to a religious awakening such as the world has never witnessed before, because men will be no longer hampered by an apparent necessity to do those things from which human nature revolts in order to obtain the satisfaction of material needs. Man is not naturally a hypocrite. Without his sanction he had been placed in a world of deceit and trickery, and in the scramble of competition all the worst passions of his nature have been stimulated. There has been placed before him at the same time the Christian ideal, a literal copying of which in a capitalist society would make him a fit candidate for the lunatic asylum or crown him with cap and bells. As the strife grows harder in these latter days he has more and more resented this position and the thought of a God who had thus ordered the world. With the discovery of Socialism comes the sense of man's responsibility for existing evils. It vindicates the justice of God and proves His divine rulership, His love and care for His human creation.

This change in our knowledge is the one thing needed to bring about a great world-wide revival of true religion and a more searching analysis of God's revealed word, and who can measure the consequences of such a recasting of our spiritual conception? Christian and Hebrew alike cannot fail to recognize the So-

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cialist philosophy as Heaven sent and the Co-operative Commonwealth as an earthly Kingdom of God.

No force ever came into the world foretold by the ancient prophets that compared with the slow, resistless movement of the working class toward industrial democracy. Can it be the stone of Daniel's vision that was to fill the whole earth, and grind to powder the kingcraft and class rulership of the world? If ever a change came into the history of the world that was worthy of a seer's vision, next to that of the Christ's coming, surely this is such a change. Prophetic students and writers point to our time as one of extraordinary meaning, as the end of an age replete with sorrow and pain, as the day of degeneracy among the faithful; and as the beginning of something new, which we have every reason to expect from the mean things of earth, from the despised and proscribed. So it may be in fulfillment of the old prophecies, that the workers of the world, the burdenbearers, the proscribed and outlawed, shall battle for, and by right of numbers, secure their freedom, and all men's through economic equality.

It is the mission of the worker, soiled and gangrened as his honest toil is with the daily vice and bestiality, to strike in his own way at the means of exploitation by which humanity has been debased. It is his mission, taught suspicion, hatred and violence through a world era of oppression and treachery, to usher in a life of peace and brotherhood. It is his mission, materialist and scoffer at the spiritual life as he is, to teach truth, self-sacrifice and righteousness to a recreant church organization and to give to us, in his rise and triumph, the crowning proof of modern times that God reigns and orders all things in His world.